

**BALTIMORE CITY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING**  
**URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE REVIEW PANEL**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Date:** April 30, 2015

**Project:** The National Great Blacks in Wax Museum

**Phase:** Final Schematic

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**Location:** 1600 Block of North Ave

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**PRESENTATION:**

Mr. Burt Jackson, Senior Project Manager for Davis Brody Bond (DBB) introduced Project Manager Cody McNeil (DBB) and Emily Scott, Landscape Architect of Gustafson Guthrie Nichol who presented the current design of the National Great Blacks in Wax Museum. Mr. McNeil began by reintroducing the project to the Panel, acknowledging changes based on the Panel comments and influences from other factors. Since the earlier presentation, additional row homes have been preserved and been incorporated into the façade along the North Avenue elevation. The Mansion and row homes at the corner of North Broadway and North Avenue are complemented by the Firehouse/Genealogy Museum and additional row house facades at the opposite corner of North Avenue and North Bond Streets. The position of the building's entrance has shifted to the East along with the Shop, while the theater has shifted West, toward the center of the block. An effort was made to maximize the green space at the rear of the building, and there is greater connectivity to that area. Mr. McNeil acknowledged that the garage has been "lifted" along with the landscape to expose the sides of the garage for natural ventilation, taking advantage of the greater than 30' grade change diagonally across the site.

Ms. Scott presented the landscape concept starting with the overhang of the main entry façade and the desire to create focused attention to the entrance and visibility at the theater area. Ms. Scott described the quality and character of the assorted spaces at the core of the block (above the garage), including the nature of the paths that lead from the underground garage into the building, the stormwater overlook paths, the programmable central green with adjacent seating, and the addition of learning structures informed by basket weaving. At the center of the museum, a Memorial Garden focuses on a single tree of great stature.

**COMMENTS OF THE PANEL:**

- There was a general consensus from the Panel that this is a beautifully-rendered proposal, if ambitious. It will be an extraordinary addition to the City if it can be realized. The designers have created a wonderful vision of a museum in a community (where it belongs).
- Concerns for the illumination of the façade and the light emitting from the garage might be disturbing the residential community that surrounds the museum. However, the channel-glass façade is a handsome idea.

- There was considerable concern that the 10' alley as described is not capable of being functional in the manner that tertiary urban streets ought to be. It should not only be handsome, it should also function.
- The position of the main entry along North Avenue is appropriate but needs greater legibility, perhaps with a canopy or other architectural feature that serves to acknowledge “this is where you enter.” In the present scheme, the Display Wall reads as entry, although there is none at that location.
- The enlarged Service Court with expanded paving doesn't seem necessary. Although visitors are no longer allowed to move through the space, perhaps the visual connection is not paving but something green, linking the Atrium to the back green.
- The Genealogy Library addition above the Firehouse façade should be pushed back further, if at all possible.
- Please assist the City in the positioning of the trees along North Avenue to reinforce the entry sequence to the museum, and reconsider how sidewalk materials are distributed. Removing the brick will assist in clarifying the sidewalk experience.
- Consider coordinating with the building architects and the structural engineers to allow for additional soils on the roof so that trees can be added to this very exposed experience. Doing so will make the roof significantly more habitable.
- In the back garden area, consider adjusting the widths of the paths so that they read as hierarchical. Presently, they are fairly even in form.
- Be cautious in relying on one singular tree in the Memorial Garden. The adjacent walls will not allow enough sun for the tree to form the stature it should for such a laudable position. Consider a fountain that can run all year – something that suggests origins but doesn't require access to the sun's rays to be impressive.
- Please adjust the renderings to reflect the actual proposed plant materials, in particular the evergreen trees in the stormwater catchment.

**PANEL RECOMMENDATION:** Final Approval with comments.

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**Attending:**

Cody McNeal and Burt Jackson – Davis Brody Bond

Emily Scott - Gustafson Guthrie Nichol

Dr. Joanne Martin – Great Blacks in Wax Museum

Marie Washington and Jackie Washington – EBEI

Director Tom Stosur, Christina Hartsfield, Theo Ngongang – Planning

Dr. Meany, Messrs. Bowden, Burns and Rubin\* - UDARP Panel